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## Brezhnev successor rumors are growing

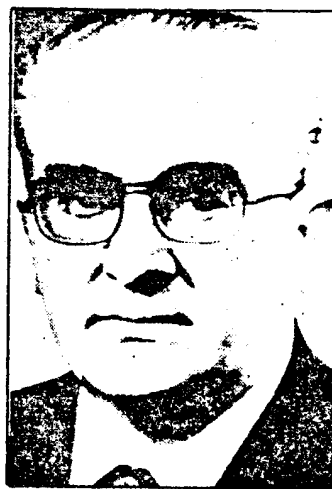
WASHINGTON — One week ago phone links between Moscow and the outside world suddenly went dead, sparking rumors that Leonid Brezhnev, the ailing 75-year-old leader of the Soviet Union, had died and the Kremlin was blacking out communications until it could settle on, and announce, the name of the new leader.

Normally such rumors are laughable and quickly dismissed. But not now. For it is widely known that Brezhnev has been very sick, only seeing about half the Eastern European leaders during his vacation in the Crimea as usual.

Even more curious, immediately on his return to Moscow on Aug. 31, senior government officials started leaking to Western reporters word that Brezhnev intended to resign by the end of the year and that the announcement could come as early as next month.

The fact that government officials on the fringes of the Politburo, rather than the usual designated leakers of information and disinformation, put out the word is considered extraordinary. Furthermore, in the 60-year history of the Soviet Union there hasn't been a single instance of its top man bowing out voluntarily. Either they have died in office, as in the case of Joseph Stalin in 1953, or were kicked out, as was Nikita Khrushchev in 1964.

Kremlin watchers throughout the world have been in a frenzy trying to analyze the strange turn of events.



**YURI ANDROPOV**  
... former head of KGB



**KONSTANTIN CHERNENKO**  
... spreading rumors

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Even though the foreign ministry officially denied that Brezhnev intended to resign, the circumstances surrounding the leaks are considered significant.

The three main hypotheses are:

1. Yuri Andropov, 68, the former head of the KGB, is seen by some analysts as trying to render Brezhnev a lame duck, thus less able to influence the passage of power to his protege, Konstantin Chernenko, 70.

Andropov is believed to have been behind a scandal last April in which "Boris the Gypsy," an intimate friend of Brezhnev's daughter Galina, was charged with illicit dealings in diamonds and foreign currency. That episode was thought aimed at casting doubts on Brezhnev's family and indirectly on him, perhaps reducing his ability to pass the baton of power.

2. Chernenko himself spread the rumors in order to give Brezhnev a push and gain power while Brezhnev remained on the throne, and also as an effort to discredit Andropov who would naturally be suspected of causing the embarrassing leaks.

3. Brezhnev, in a mood of depression over his ill health, caused the leaks to signal his desire to be relieved of the heavy burdens of office, particularly as party secretary, and wanted the establishment to be thinking in terms of his retirement with great honor at a time when he could still influence the succession.

Western intelligence analysts say each of these explanations is plausible, but the most likely is that Andropov is making his move.

Another interesting clue to the relative status of the contenders is that Andropov, who, when he was elevated to the powerful party secretariat last May, gave up his con-



ANDREI KIRILENKO  
... cloud lifting ('62 photo)

trol over the KGB and other internal security agencies to Chernenko, is now about to host the visit of a key Latin American chief of internal security. Since May, Chernenko has hosted such visits.

Some analysts point out, however, that still another contender, Andrei Kirilenko, 75, who once was considered the heir apparent but who for months has been under a cloud, suddenly has started to come back to prominence, making important speeches. "Kirilenko is not Brezhnev's stand-in at official functions, as once was the case," one analyst said, "but he's gained a lot of ground back lately. He's no longer low man on the totem pole. He's still a viable contender, especially as an interim, compromise candidate."

What all this suggests is that while the Russians may not have invented baseball, politically they practice a form of very rough hardball.

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